Family Photographs in Communist Albania: State Photography and the Private Sphere

Gilles de Rapper, Anouck Durand

To be published in Eckehard Pistrick, Nicola Scaldaferri & Gretel Schwörer-Kohl (eds.), *Audiovisual Media and Identity in Southeastern Europe*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing (forthcoming)

Family Photographs in Communist Albania: State Photography and the Private Sphere

Gilles de Rapper, CNRS-IDEMEC, Aix-en-Provence

Anouck Durand, photographe, Paris

This paper is written by a social anthropologist and a photographer. We use images in two ways. First, as objects produced in a specific social context (Communist Albania), according to certain aesthetic codes and using certain techniques. As such, this paper is a contribution to the history of photography in Albania. Second, we use the same images as a way to reach some aspects of social relations, namely the relations between families and state structures and agents. Looking both at the process of production of family images and at their social uses, we try to understand the status and constitution of the private sphere in the context of Communist Albania. Communism was a time of deep transformations in Albania. It was a time of modernisation (in terms of state structures, alphabetisation, secularisation, etc.) and of industrialisation. Following André Rouillé's suggestion that photography has a close relationship to industrialisation and modernisation (Rouillé 2005), we look at photography as a privileged medium, used by states agents as well as by families, to document and represent the transformation of society. We do not mean however that other kinds of images did not count; painted images also played a role, and television became more and more powerful throughout the communist period. Actually, several prominent photographers of the time were trained as painters; others worked in television and film industry. The aim of our paper is not however to study the relations between the different socialist realist media. We focus on photography as the main medium of family images.

Photography is known to have a long history in Albania, at least since the Italian photographer Pietro Marubbi (1834-1903, known in Albanian as Pjetër Marubi) started working in Shkodër (Vrioni 2009: 16). The work of the first Albanian photographers has been studied since the seventies of last century (Girard 1982; Girard, Marubi-Codelli*, et al.* 1997), with a special emphasis on the Marubi family (Kadaré 1995). According to most authors, this "golden age" of Albanian photography ended in 1944 with the communist takeover.[1] Consequently, Albanian photography of the second part of the twentieth century has received very little attention and has been considered only through the falsification of photographs for propaganda purposes, as it has been the case for other dictatorial regimes (Jaubert 1986, King 1997).

[1] "L'âge d'or de la photographie albanaise, 1858-1945" was the title of a conference held at the University of Chicago in Paris in February 2009.

The aim of this paper is to present the first results of an on-going research project on the social uses of photography in Communist Albania.[2] Although we are interested in official and propaganda photography, we would like to focus here on a less known aspect of photography in Albania, family photography. Social sciences have long been interested in the relationship between family and photography and it is established that photography tells a lot about family forms and kinship relations (Bourdieu 1965). Family albums are narratives; they tell the story of the family and produce an image of the family. We would like to question this image in the context of Communist Albania, in which both photography and family were subject to political representations and practices.

Family photographs: the social conditions of their production

Before looking at family photographs and examining what kind of self-image they produce, it is necessary to explain the social conditions of their production. The content and meaning of family photography is not only a matter of what kind of photographs people keep and how they look at them; it is also a matter of how these photographs are produced, within a particular social configuration. This is especially the case in Communist Albania, for at least two reasons: first, there was a limited access to private photography, which means that family photographs were generally not produced within the family; second, family photography appears to be dependent on the state production of photography, as all photographers were progressively enrolled in state institutions. In the first part of our paper, we will first discuss the status of private photography, which has to be seen as varying according to time and space. We will then present the state organisation of "public" photography, as it was called, within which most of family photographs were produced.

The limits of private photography

Family photography as "domestic fabrication of domestic emblems", to quote Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1965: 51), scarcely exists in Communist Albania. Throughout the communist period, photography, understood as taking pictures, is not a popular practice. The first level of explanation is structural and economic and relates to the situation prevailing before 1945. The interwar period (locally known as "Zogu's time", *në kohën e Zogut*) saw the development of professional photography, at least in the main cities and sometimes in villages. Private-owned studios were opened by photographers trained abroad. Their activity consisted in individual or group portraits, art photography being only a way of advertising their work.[3] At the same time, the first photo reporters appeared (such as Vasil Ristani) and newspapers started to publish photographs. Little is known about the role played by the state at the time: the royal court seemed to have its official photographers (Maca, Marubi) and the first photo album, published in 1938, was dedicated to the 10th anniversary of Zogu's reign.[4] Apart from professional photographers, only upper-class families had a private practice.

Our argument is that despite the scarcity of amateur photographs in Communist Albania, this period saw the popularisation of family photographs. It seems that all families had, to a greater or lesser extent, access to photography. Actually, the figure of the amateur photographer, which already existed before 1944, did not disappear with the communist takeover. Many Albanian students came

[2] This research is conducted in the framework of BALKABAS, a research project supported by the Agence nationale de la recherche (ANR-08-JCJC-0091-01).
[3] It must be said that little is known about the clients of those photographers.
[4] Our knowledge on this period relies on Vrioni 2009.

back from the Soviet Union in the fifties with a camera that they used for family purpose or sold to amateurs. In the sixties, the well-known and widely distributed magazine *Ylli* (The Star), a monthly and illustrated supplement to the daily *Zëri i Popullit* (The People's Voice), occasionally published a column with hints for amateur photographers.[5] The same magazine organised photographic competitions open to both professional and amateur photographers. Although most of the participants and prizewinners were professional photographers, the aim of these competitions was, according to a former editor of the magazine, to stimulate the practice of photography by non-professional photographers. The authors of the best photographs could be called to Tirana and trained in the magazine's photographic laboratory.[6]

This way of promoting photography reveals however what kind of photographs was favoured: competitions were organised on themes such as "the last year of the 3rd five-year plan" (1965), "the electrification of the country" (1970) or "the 30 anniversary of Liberation" (1973). Amateur photography was thus intended to produce documents and testimonies that would illustrate the "construction of socialism", a task already undertaken by professional photographers and, beyond photography, by other specialists of culture, media and art. It was also meant to develop social-realist aesthetics codes among theses photographers. Altogether, the regime seems to have worked towards a democratisation of amateur photography, at least in the fifties and sixties. Until 1966, the "School of Culture" (*Shkolla e kulturës*) provided a one-year course on photography to the people working in the "houses of culture" (*shtëpitë e kulturës*). Their task was then to take pictures of all activities taking place in their village or cooperative. In the village of Bitinckë, in South-Eastern Albania, people remember that Enver Hoxha, on the occasion of his visit to the village in 1957, offered a camera to the cooperative, in order to document through photography the achievements of the farm. Such practices are remembered in other villages. Thus, state institutions generally encouraged the practice of photography by amateurs, but it was not oriented mainly towards family photography.[7]

Nevertheless, several of our informants, having in mind the last phase of the communist period rather than its beginning, recall that private cameras were forbidden and that taking pictures was a risky practice that could send one to prison. Actually, starting in 1966, it was formally forbidden to develop one's films in private houses.[8] This prohibition extended to professional photographers as well. Apart from that, we have not found any evidence of a legal restriction to the ownership and use of cameras by non-professional photographers. On the contrary, we have met several amateurs who kept using their camera until the collapse of the regime. The common idea that private photography was forbidden reveals however that the production of photography within the family was not only a matter of access to a camera, to films and to the skills to use them. Other forms of barriers and restrictions emerged, notably self-censorship and the feeling that every photograph could expose its author to a political judgement. We will come back to this idea in the second part of the paper; for now, it is worth looking at the owners of cameras and their photographic practice.

[5] The magazine reached a run of 25,000 copies in 1986 (for a population of 3,000,000).

[6] See Joschke 2004 for a similar attempt to propagate aesthetic standards through competitions and amateur photography in late nineteenth century Germany.

[7] This attempt was a failure; it had no effect in creating a private production of photography. We will develop this marginal aspect in further publications. For a similar attempt in the Soviet Union in the interwar period, see Lemagny, Rouillé 1986: 129-131.

[8] According to interviews with professional photographers in Tirana.

Altogether, private owners of cameras were rare, especially outside Tirana. Albania never produced cameras and had to rely on imported material. The origin of the cameras used in the country thus reflects its relations with the outside world. During the interwar period, cameras would come from Italy, the United States, Germany and Turkey. The strong economic ties established with Italy during the reign of Ahmed Zogu (1924-1939) are notably responsible for the import of many cameras by officers and soldiers, merchants and students. During the war, cameras could be bought to German or Italian soldiers and others, found on the battleground, supplied a second-hand market for a few years. After the Second World War, travelling outside the country was shrunk to a very distinctive segment of the population, a new situation that affected the origin of photographic material used in Albania. Other cameras thus entered the country in the fifties, when many Albanians travelled to Moscow and other cities of Eastern Europe. At that time, it was also possible to buy a camera in state stores called *kinkaleri*. Up to the mid sixties most of the material available was imported from the Soviet Union.[9] Among the most popular was the Zorki camera, a copy of the German Leica whose production started in 1948. We found one, purchased in 1960 by a 22 year-old villager from South-Eastern Albania. It cost at the time two months of his salary as a cooperative worker and he was the first and only one in his village to have a camera. Compact cameras, easier to use, were also available. In the early sixties, a student, Sofika, bought a Beirette (an East-German compact) in a *kinkaleri* in Tirana. Sofika recalls taking pictures in the streets of Tirana without any fear or feeling of transgression. After the breaking of relations with the Soviet Union in 1961, copies of Western or Soviet cameras were imported from China. Members of the ruling class and their children, who were allowed to travel to the West, were the only ones to use western-made cameras.

The identity of camera owners reveals a sharp distinction between urban areas, and particularly the capital city Tirana, and rural ones, at least in the first decades of the communist period. As we shall see later on, photography, and family photography in particular, underwent a kind of democratisation throughout the communist period and photo shops were established all around the country, allowing access to photography to the most remote villages. Non-professional practice remained however concentrated in Tirana and in a few other cities.

The late seventies appear as a turning point regarding access to camera. In Tirana, the *kinkaleri* for cameras disappeared. According to most of our informants, after this period finding a camera inside the country or abroad became very unlikely for non-professional photographers.[10] Although the magazine *Ylli* continued to organise photographic competitions, its column for amateur photographers disappeared. It seems that the economic crisis following the breaking of relations with China (1978) was responsible for the shortage of photographic material in state stores (as well as in cooperative photo shops, as we will see below). The official stand was that private photography was a luxury and bourgeois practice. In this respect, Albania differs from other European countries where the democratisation of access to practising photography was occurring.

The existence of a camera in the family did not mean intensive practice of photography. Films were not always available in shops, especially after 1970. When available, they were always produced in

[9] The first trade agreement concluded between Albania and the Soviet Union, in November 1945, mentioned the import of photographic material (Fishta, Ziu 2004: 265).

[10] A young man from the region of Shpat (Elbasan) managed to buy a Beirette in 1986, at the village shop. Most of the pictures he has were taken between 1989 and 1992. The last years of the communist regime seem to witness a kind of liberalisation: a few cameras entered the country, and some "illegal" street photographers were tolerated.

other communist countries. The East-German brand Orwo is the most usually remembered.[11] In the last years of the communist period, paper and films were also imported from Romania and Yugoslavia; their quality is remembered as being very poor. Another limit to the private use of camera is to be found in the lack of technical knowledge on photography. There were no books or amateur associations where one could learn about photography. The few amateur photographers we met managed to learn basic knowledge on photography through the help of professionals working in the public workshops, proving that another barrier–access to technical knowledge–could be overstepped.[12]

These are evidence that there was no official interdiction of private photography. This activity was however under control. The owners of cameras tended to limit their own practice, notably because state-employed photographers, who processed the films, were suspected of reporting to the police or to be themselves watched by the police. Self-censorship was a necessity. Owning a camera was so rare in some parts of the population that it resulted in distinguishing oneself and could be seen as a sign of wealth. A villager from South-Eastern Albania, who presents himself as fond of photography, but who never had a camera, explains: "What was the point of having a camera? It was a way to carry all the weight of the world upon one's shoulders". In this matter, one had to be sure of one's "biography": private photography was easier for those whose relations to the authorities were clear and satisfying.[13] The ones who did not enjoy the confidence of the authorities perceived photography as a dangerous activity: they could be suspected of spying and selling pictures to the enemy; they could be suspected of taking "immoral" photographs, i.e. photographs of women or couples; they could also be seen as undertaking a private and profitable activity to the detriment of professional photographers.

To conclude this section, one can say that the assessment that private photography was forbidden is both inexact and accurate to describe what many families actually felt: the practice of private photography was an exception. In the same time, from the sixties onwards, consumption of photography was generally widespread. Family photographs, however, were taken by state photographers.

The organisation of "public" photography

Family photography became in fact dependent on the state and its monopoly of the making of pictures. A few years after the communist takeover, public studios opened in Tirana and in the main cities of the country. At the same time, private studios were progressively shut down and private photographers were driven to join the public studios or to work for other state institutions. By the early sixties, with the exception of a small number of amateur photographers, all the needs in family photography were covered by state photographers. In fact, even private owners of cameras had to rely on this state service to develop and print their pictures.

[11] All along the communist period official photographers had free access to Kodak films that were officially forbidden in the country.

[12] Color photography is a different case. All along the communist period, we have no knowledge of an amateur photograph that had access to color photography.

[13] "Biography" is a political instrument that used family background and family liability to produce and reproduce lines of division that were fundamental for the ruling class to stay in power (de Rapper 2006; Kretsi 2007).

To our knowledge, the first public studio opened in Tirana as early as 1947. It was intended to offer the same services as private photographers did at that time: most of the production consisted in portraits, identity photographs and souvenir photographs.

It is important to note that within the same year the Albanian Telegraphic Agency (ATA), established in December 1944, started to employ professional photographers (Vasil Ristani and Mehmet Kallfa, who both previously owned studios in Tirana). It was to become in the following years the main photographic institution, a place where new generations of photographers were trained by older ones who had ceased their private activity. This was also the time when the new authorities enrolled several photographers–most of them owning their private studios at the time–all over the country to realise the first campaign of identity photographs. The new state needed photography for propaganda purposes but also to identify its citizens (de Rapper, Durand 2011). Altogether, these events attest that photography was seen as a political instrument that had to be kept under state control.

Progressively, this state organisation of photography developed in three directions (Fusha 1985: 286): propaganda photography (for the media and "socialist emulation"), scientific photography (in medicine, archaeology, chemistry and physics) and public photography (*shërbim publik*, literally "public service"). Public studios were established in all urban centres and in some villages. They were known as "studio" (*studio*), "department" (*repart*) or "cooperative" (*kooperativë*).

In the first years of their existence, public studios coexisted with private ones. Most of them were actually run by former private photographers who had to stop their activity. In 1945 and 1946, the new state passed laws which resulted in heavy taxation on all private activities (Fishta, Ziu 2004: 260-261). Many photographers, together with other craftsmen and merchants who were not able to pay the taxes, were forced to join the public studios or find a job in other state institutions (ministries, press agency, museums, etc.).

In the early sixties the takeover of the state is brutal. Private photographers were asked to close down their shops and join cooperatives that were part of larger structures called "enterprise for repairs and services" (*Ndërmarrja e Riparim-Shërbimeve*, NRSH), "craftsmanship" (*Artizanati*), or "municipal (enterprise)" (*Komunalja*): these structures offered a variety of services to the population, from tailors and shoemakers to umbrella and TV repairmen. The entire private sector was concerned, not only photography. Earning money by taking pictures became impossible outside the frame of official photo shops.

Public photographers like many other workers in cooperative and state structures, were submitted to "quotas" (*norma*): in order to receive their full salary, they had to produce a certain quantity of photographs[14]. This left little time for experiments and creative work. Moreover, the aesthetics of social-realism imposed stereotyped kinds of photographs which prevented any attempt to turn photography into an "art bourgeois": *chiaroscuro* and fuzziness were forbidden; portraits had to be taken frontally, in opposition to what had been common practice before 1944 and again up to the early sixties in the private studios.

[14] One roll per day in the sixties. If more than two pictures were badly exposed on the roll, the photographer had to pay.

Another effect of this organisation was a strong subjective feeling of hierarchy between photographers. Professional photographers did not form one single group. There is a sharp contrast between those who were employed in state institutions (ATSH, ministries...) and those who worked in the cooperatives. The first ones were better trained and worked using high quality equipment and material; the others had generally a limited knowledge about photography and had to work with poor quality equipment. Differences existed also among public photographs: the quality of equipment and training was very different according to local situations. In Tirana the main studios seem to have had all the equipment they required for black and white photography. In Korçë, on the contrary, the former head of the cooperative remembers that, as all cooperatives had quantitative plans to achieve, he would repeatedly argue during meetings that they were short in cameras. In 1975 he was eventually told to go to Tirana for a national meeting of all the heads of photographers' cooperatives. He was then given four or five Praktica (East-German cameras generally used in public studios) they kept using up to the end of 1990. In Gjirokastër, a former photographer told us that chemicals and paper were generally missing. As electricity shortage was also a problem in the late eighties, employees made their own heater (from a barbecue grill) to be able to heat the products. Altogether, photographers working in public studios outside Tirana complain about the scarcity and low quality of the equipment they had to use, especially after 1980.

This organisation of public photography went on until the end of the communist regime in 1991. Changes were introduced following the political evolution of the country. In the early eighties, attempts were made to separate the different tasks within a studio: the photographer would only take pictures, while other employees would care for the development and printing, and other ones would stand at the counter and deliver the photographs to the clients. As we shall see, this was intended to prevent the making of "non politically correct" photographs through mutual control on the different steps of the overall process. In the late eighties on the contrary, a change was introduced which gave more freedom to photographers: the quotas were abolished and the price paid by customers went almost entirely to the photographer.

Access to photography through this state organisation took different ways. Some of the family photographs found in the albums were taken in state-run studios on various occasions: weddings, visit to town, first day at school (fig. 1). Some of the photographers attached to public structures were known to work 'outdoors' (*në natyrë*): they stood in public parks and tourists' places, offering their services to tourists and passers-by. Tirana's central square, with Skënderbeg's monument and Tirana International Hotel, was a favourite place for these photographers. It was also possible to call up a photographer on special occasions, such as wedding ceremonies. In that case, it was compulsory for the photographers to fulfil the demand, even if it implies photographing four or five weddings on the same day. Money was not an issue; all the informants agree on that point. The price of a picture was "half the price of a two-kilo bread".[15] Finally, photographers were enrolled in nation-wide campaigns to produce identity photographs. Every time a new type of identity document was issued, the whole population of the country was photographed. This was achieved by giving each photographer enrolled in these campaigns a number of villages whose inhabitants were to be photographed one by one. For inhabitants of remote villages, that was the only opportunity to see a photographer and to be photographed.

[15] A former employee of the public Studio Skënderbeu, in Tirana, gives the following prices (in the eighties): size 9x12 cm: 9 lek; 6x9 cm: 6,5 lek 4x6 cm: 3,5 lek. For that price the customer would get two prints and the negative.

In all these cases, family photography is clearly dependent on the production of photographs by the state and for the state. There is however a gap in the access to photography between villagers who had to attend annual political events or the renewing of their identity documents and Tirana inhabitants who could have their picture taken every time they walked on the streets. But the externalisation of the photographic process is alike: in most cases, producers and consumers of family photographs are two different groups.

All around the country, photographers and families would follow a more or less explicit code of conduct when posing. Codes where set on physical, moral or aesthetics aspects: in the seventies it was unwise to photograph a man with long hair or wild pant; unmarried women should not wear make-up (whereas there were no such interdictions before), shirts had to be strictly closed, unmarried couple should not touch nor kiss. As we said, blurry pictures and *chiaroscuro* were seen as bourgeois. Frontal pose was then the more common practice. Furthermore, both in order to please the customer and to obey the communist propaganda, which claimed that poverty had disappeared, the studios kept formal jackets to let to the poorest ones. In the outdoors, poverty along with traditional rural scenes would always be out of frame.

Although self-censorship seems to have been the rule among public photographers, there is also evidence that some of them made pictures which were not "politically correct": some photographers were eager to experiment forbidden techniques such as *chiaroscuro* and *solarisation*; others would not refuse to take pictures of young men with long hair and managed to do it unobserved from their colleagues, who would have reported on them. It is in order to counter these attempts that the above-mentioned interdiction to develop films at home and the 'centralisation' were introduced in 1966 and 1979 respectively.

To conclude on the making of family pictures, it appears that photographs in Albania during communist times do not fit the pattern of family photography drawn by André Rouillé for Western Europe: the operator remains outside the scenes he takes; he is not the *destinataire* of his own pictures (Rouillé 2005: 240).

The social uses of photography

If we turn now to the status and function of family photography in Communist Albania, two points appear to be of importance: first, the particular social conditions of the photographic production do not prevent photography from having a family function; second, this family function, however, constantly interferes with a political function. Photography thus echoes the political uses of family and kinship relations by the communist regime.

Albums and photographs

What we call "family photography" should be clear by now: family photography is not merely photographs produced within the family, but all sorts of photographs kept and transmitted within the family, sometimes together with letters and documents, which tell the story of the family. Their authors are of different kinds; they are often unknown. The pictures are kept either in photo albums or, most of the time, in plastic bags and envelopes. This reflects a shortage of albums in shops of communist time rather than a lack of interest for photographs. Some albums were made after 1990, when the object became available. Other pictures could be placed on the walls, but you had to be

sure that their content was politically correct. Even when pictures are kept outside albums, they are looked at and members of the family know their existence. For this reason, in the present paper, we speak of "family albums" whether photographs are kept in albums or not.

The size of these albums varies from one family to another, but every family has pictures to show. Urban families generally have more photographs than rural ones; members of the local ruling class have more than people from the lower classes; family background before the war is also of importance: even when they have been "declassed" (*deklasuar*) during Communism, families belonging to the former local elite usually keep an interest in family photography.

Albums are generally constituted of photographs of various origins which are nevertheless considered of equal affective value: some were made on purpose, as a souvenir from a journey to town; others were taken on the occasion of official activities (meetings, festivals); there are also identity photographs or portraits taken for the sake of "socialist emulation"; finally, at least in Southern Albania, lots of families kept pictures send from abroad by migrants, before the Second World War or just after it.

The family function of photography

In spite of their external production, these family albums are of great value for the family: this can be seen first of all in the fact that while almost everything that could recall communist times in the country was destroyed, family albums are still there. In spite of the political turmoil, population movements or changes in the furniture and decoration of the house, those images of the communist past are still present in every family.

Actually, only one of them is generally missing today: in all the houses, the only colour photograph was a picture of Enver Hoxha usually hanging in the dining room on the middle of the wall (*në krye*, *në mes*), so that it would be seen at first sight when entering the room. Once again, it was not compulsory, but not having it would be a (dangerous) way to stand out: "Not having it would be holding propaganda for the enemies". Pictures could be bought (one could chose between different sizes and epochs in Enver Hoxha's life) or cut from magazines. Making or personalising the frame was a way to show one's adhesion to the leading chief. Some families would have one or two other personal pictures on the walls, but it was not the rule. Even if Enver Hoxha's picture was clearly a domestic emblem, no one recalls it now as a family photograph.[16]

Another indication of the personal relationship held with these photographs is the transformations some of them underwent: hand-made coloration mainly, but also some repairs (one picture was sewed). In the seventies, living in a remote village of the Devoll district, Elona made her own colour photographs: she painted her dress with Chinese colour pencils the way she wished she had been pictured. Today she comments this saying: "He [Enver Hoxha] only had access to colour photography, we would only get black and white". These attempts towards colour pictures seem to have increased in the eighties, as shown by other examples of hand-coloured photographs. Thereby, hand-made transformation can be seen as both as a sign of criticism toward the quality of the pictures (colour

[16] Our informants, even when asked never mentioned the possession of Enver Hoxha's photographs spontaneously: "Have you destroyed pictures of that period?" The question had to be more precise to get a positive answer: "Did you have Enver Hoxha's picture in your house?"

photography became available to the public only after 1991), and as a genuine private relationship between the photograph and its owner.

Family photography in Communist Albania bears the same function as in any other country: it produces an image of the family's unity and integration by recording various events of family life. It serves the identity of the family as a group (Sontag 2008: 21). "What a family has to tell, says a woman from Tirana, is told through photography." She keeps lots of photographs, some of them in albums, and relates her interest in photography to her family situation: she has no brother nor male first cousin to continue the line, her grand-father's lineage will disappear; photography is a way of maintaining its existence. She also mentions their political status during communism: they had a "bad biography": her father, husband and father-in-law were imprisoned for many years following political accusations. Photography, she says, is also a way of telling about this painful family history (fig. 2). However, this family function is not limited to families with a "bad biography". A man from South-Eastern Albania, who succeeded to reach a high position in his district and is known to have a "good biography", explains the fact that his family has a great number of photographs at home by relating it to their social success. "Photography, he says, attests the family's development (*zhvillim*); others families were not as fond of photography as we were."

Beyond their singularity as narratives of a single and unique family, these albums share many common features.[17] The same photographs seem to appear in every album, a fact already noticed for other contexts (Rouillé 2005: 244). The specificity of the Albanian context lies in the kind of events that are represented, and those that are not. Indoors photography is notably underrepresented. Besides numerous photographs of young men doing their military service, there are lots of pictures showing young women performing military drills, or more accurately relaxing between those drills. There are also pictures showing volunteers working in railway or road construction, in agriculture, or, once again, resting during these obligatory periods of volunteer work. Other photographs were taken during local celebrations, as already mentioned, or at work, by professional photographers employed in factories or visiting cooperatives and state farms.

Altogether, these photographs tell us about the integration of members of the family into the socialist society rather than the integration of the family as a whole. Pictures of family ceremonies are extremely rare, because professional photographers would not enter the domestic space (most of them had no flash light to use), but also because family ceremonies were themselves rare. Wedding is the one exception, but hiring a photographer on a wedding day was not common practice outside Tirana and the main cities. One of our amateur photographers keeps pictures of his wedding in 1966, in a village of South-Eastern Albania (most of them were taken by another photographer hired on the occasion), but no other family ceremony is represented in his album. Actually, apart from taking pictures of his children at home, this man reproduced a kind of stereotyped photographs showing him at work or with local officials, outside the private sphere.

The album of the Tirana woman already mentioned is in this respect remarkable. Her brother-in-law worked as a photographer for the Ministry of Health and had his own camera that he would use on private occasions. She has for instance lots of pictures of her wedding that are very different from

[17] At the very top of the communist hierarchy, in Tirana only, families living in the *Bllok* (a district inhabited by the communist leaders) had a very different access to photography. Their family albums do not fit in the pattern described in this paper.

the conventional photographs of the bride with her relatives. The fact that the family had a "bad biography" also affected the kind of photography they made: their family life had specificities that made them different from families with a "good biography". Looking at pictures of family dinners on New Year's Day, the woman says that other families in the neighbourhood would go out on New Year's Day and dine in restaurants. Their own position compelled them to celebrate at home–enemies of the regime were not allowed to rejoice in public–with relatives and friends who shared the same stigma. Finally, the album contains several pictures of her future husband on the day he returned home after eight years in prison, in 1960. In this case, photography is clearly a way to assert the identity and unity of the family against the state. Pictures like these ones should be kept inside the domestic sphere and were not to be seen outside because they had a political dimension. This political function of family albums was clear enough at the time and probably explains why albums of such families were kept secret but also confiscated by the authorities along with other personal writings as proofs on a trial, or simply destroyed.

The political function of family photography

Photography in Communist Albania was political in two different ways: first, pictures were produced to serve political purposes; their production was driven by state officials; second, every picture could be interpreted in political terms (Rouet, Soulages 2009: 233). Family photographs, as long as they serve the integration of the family, are not a direct political product; they are however produced within a system (the nationalisation of photography), or exceptionally outside this system, which tends to make a political product of every photograph. Moreover, family photographs, like all other pictures, were subject to a political reading. That might explain why, compared to official or propaganda photography, which is full of meaning and generally bears an obvious political message, family photographs seem almost meaningless: compositions are stereotyped and natural background is almost non-existent. It looks as if family photographs should not allow any political reading that opposes the official image of the family. As soon as they had a virtual political meaning, they became dangerous. Such were the pictures showing Albanians with foreigners. A man from a small town of South-Eastern Albania who used to work as a chauffeur remembers how he would drive Chinese experts and engineers around the country, in the seventies, before he got married. The Chinese visitors took lots of pictures of him and offered him to keep them. His mother however, whose own father was in prison at the time, did not want to keep such dangerous documents and destroyed all the pictures showing her son with Chinese and saved only the politically neutral ones, representing her son alone, in various places of Albania. Fortunately, the man was engaged at the time and also gave pictures to his fiancée. She did not destroy them, even after Albania broke relations with China in 1978, because she did not feel exposed to control and political judgment.

On the other hand, family photographs could attest the adherence of the family to the regime. When the village museums[18] were created, in 1963 and afterwards, their directors visited families known to have fought on the right side during Second World War and collected pictures of partisans which were to be displayed in the museum. Having a picture of one's kin in the museum was in return seen as a way to receive a financial contribution (as a pension) and social prestige: it was an asset in acquiring the privileged status of "martyr" (*dëshmor*).

[18] The function of these museums was less to depict village life in history than to impose the official writing of local history along the political line opposing the people to its enemies; local families and kin groups were distributed along this line.

This is also illustrated by two pictures taken by an amateur photographer from a village in the region of Korçë. The first one shows his wife helping their two children with their homework (fig. 3); the second one shows his daughter, a few years later, when she was a high school student in town. Both photographs were exhibited in the village museum. These pictures are in a way more "domestic" than lots of family photographs we have seen: there are produced at home, with a private camera, and show members of the family in the reality of everyday life. At the same time they bear a political message and for this reason were displayed in a public space. Their meaning is political on two levels: in the message they bear and in the fact that they were selected by the village museum. The message is clear: the first picture reminds housewives that they have to assist their children and children that they have do to their homework; the second one says that village girls can also study in town and are not confined to village life. On the second level, the reason of their selection is also clear: according to their author, the main reason for showing them was not their aesthetic value nor their intrinsic political message, but the fact the family had a "good biography" and, as such, could be shown as example in the village museum.

We are reaching here the visual dimension of "biography". Individuals and families with a "good biography" could be photographed and have their pictures displayed in public spaces: at work, at school, in newspapers and magazines. Those with a "bad biography" had no access to public space in terms of image. They should not appear on the same level. A woman from South-Eastern Albania, who was employed several years in Kombinati Mao Ce Dun in Berat, remembers that her picture as a "distinguished worker" disappeared from the "board of emulation" in 1974 when it was revealed that one of her father's cousins had fled from the country years before. Professional photographers speak about the obligation and difficulty of avoiding photographing people with "bad biographies". Recently looking at a photograph representing twenty people saluting a parade, its author, Petrit Kumi, told us that it took him a week to make sure that none of the people posing for him had a "bad biography". As we have seen, this does not mean that people with "bad biographies" had no family photographs. Photographers working in photo shops confirm that they took pictures of everyone, regardless of their "biography". But these pictures had to remain hidden, in the private sphere.

Conclusion

State control and organisation of the production of pictures did not prevent photography from accomplishing a family function. Most of the families kept a photographic record of their lives, even if those photographs were not produced within the family.

The practice of photography, either private or professional, was however subjected to political principles. "Biography" was one of those principles. On the one hand, it excluded individuals and families from public images (as it excluded them from public life); on the other hand, it gave a political meaning to family photography, either in the sense of resistance to the state oppression or in the sense of a successful integration into socialist society.

In fact, both "biography" and family photography can be seen as narratives. Each one in its own way, they create the unity of individual or family stories and give them a social meaning. At the same time, both are related to the political context of Communist Albania: the political criteria of biography is an instrument of control and repression, while family photography, as we have just seen, exists within or in opposition to the nationalisation of photography as a will to control the production of images.

Thus, looking at family photographs in Communist Albania offers a perspective on three sets of relationships which are generally studied separately, but should be analysed together: the state and photography, with the definition of propaganda photography; photography and the family, with the family function of photography, and finally the family and the state, with the use of family background and family liability by the authorities.

References

Bourdieu, Pierre (ed.) 1965. *Un art moyen. Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie*. Paris: Les éditions de Minuit.

de Rapper, Gilles. 2006. La 'biographie' : parenté incontrôlable et souillure politique dans l'Albanie communiste et post-communiste. *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 4, http://www.ejts.org/document565.html.

de Rapper, Gilles, Durand, Anouck. 2011. 1948-2008. 35 photos d'identité. Photographie et régime d'identification dans l'Albanie communiste. *Annuario* 1,

Fishta, Iljaz, Ziu, Mihal. 2004. *Historia e ekonomisë së Shqipërisë (1944-1960)*. Tiranë: Dita.

Fusha, Besim. 1985. Fotografia. In: Aleks Buda (ed.) *Fjalor enciklopedik shqiptar*. Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, pp. 286.

Girard, Gérard. 1982. Notes on early photography in Albania. *History of Photography* 6, 3: 241-256.

Girard, Gérard, Marubi-Codelli, Gegë*, et al.* 1997. *La photographie ancienne en Albanie : 1863-1967*. Saint-Denis: Edition A.F.A., Université de Vincennes.

Jaubert, Alain. 1986. *Le commissariat aux archives. Les photos qui falsifient l'histoire*. Paris: Editions Bernard Barrault.

Joschke, Christian. 2004. Aux origines des usages sociaux de la photographie. La photographie amateur en Allemagne entre 1890 et 1910. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 154: 53-65.

Kadaré, Ismail. 1995. *Albanie, visage des Balkans. Ecrits de lumière*. Paris: Arthaud.

King, David. 1997. *The Commissar Vanishes*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company.

Kretsi, Georgia. 2007. "Good and bad Biography". The Concept of Family Liability in the Practice of State Domination in Socialist Albania. In: Ulf Brunnbauer, Andreas Helmedach & Stefan Troebst (eds.), *Schnittstellen. Gesellschaft, Nation, Konflikt und Erinnerung in Südosteuropa*. München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, pp. 175-188.

Lemagny, Jean-Claude, Rouillé, André. 1986. *Histoire de la photographie*. Paris: Bordas.

Rouet, Gilles, Soulages, François (eds.). 2009. *Du Printemps de Prague à la chute du Mur de Berlin. Photographie et politique*. Paris: Klincksieck.

Rouillé, André. 2005. *La photographie*. Paris: Gallimard.

Sontag, Susan. 2008. *Sur la photographie*. Paris: Christian Bourgois.

Vrioni, Qerim. 2009. *150 vjet fotografi shqiptare*. Tiranë: Milosao.